

Boston Strategic Homeless Planning Group

Summary Report



Thomas M. Menino
Mayor, City of Boston

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November 2000

Dear Friends:

With our economy booming and our neighborhoods thriving, and unemployment and crime rates dropping to new record lows, it should come as no surprise to anyone that Boston is enjoying an economic and cultural Renaissance.

However, in Boston, this economic upswing also has a downside. In spite of the great prosperity we are experiencing, low and middle income wage earners are struggling to find housing in our City because the housing market is becoming increasingly unaffordable.

We are seeing more working people becoming homeless because of high rents and low vacancy rates. Last year, our homeless shelters were over capacity every month of the year for the first time in our city's history.

Boston is recognized as a national leader in homeless services and housing. However, we still need more help. The federal government has reduced the amount of funding for homeless programs in Boston by 37% since 1995 and state funding for affordable housing has also decreased.

Working together with the community of homeless providers, advocates and consumers, my administration is tackling the problems of homelessness head on with a new 5-year strategic plan.

Our plan intends to end homelessness for thousands of individuals and families by expanding the supply and access to permanent affordable housing that is targeted to the homeless; expand the employment opportunities and economic services to assist homeless people to become more self-sufficient; prevent homelessness through improved discharge planning and on-going coordination among state and local criminal justice and social service agencies; maintain and strengthen the existing infrastructure and current capacity of Boston's homeless system; improve coordination and collaboration; and advocate with Federal, State and Local governments to increase public awareness and access to mainstream resources.

I am proud of the City's commitment to improving the lives of homeless people. This plan will be implemented by many stakeholders, as listed in our document. As Mayor, I will continue to guarantee that there is a shelter bed for each person who needs one, and that my administration will continue to look at how mainstream resources can be utilized to end homelessness.

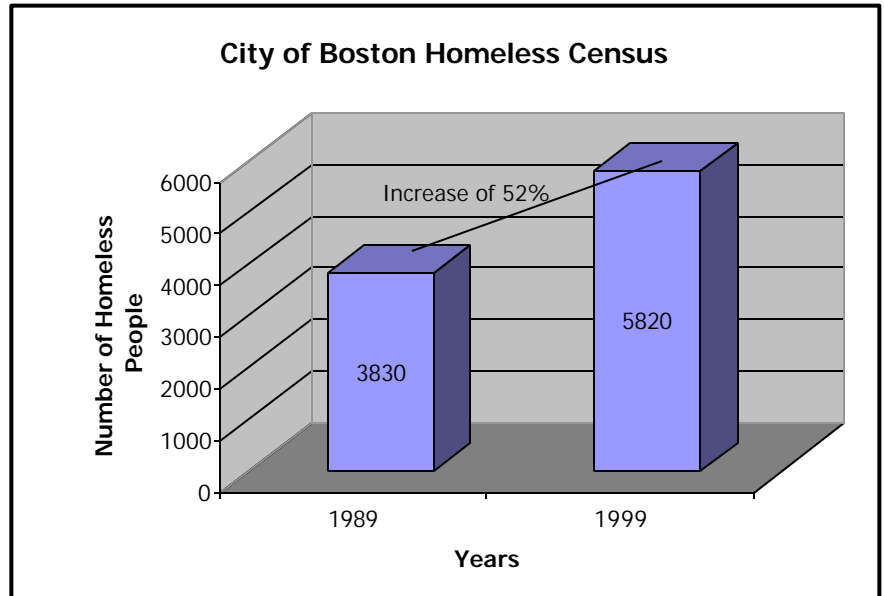
Sincerely,

Thomas M. Menino, Mayor
City of Boston

Introduction

Over the course of the past 15 years, Boston has created a vast network to combat homelessness. These efforts have resulted in a homeless system that is comprehensive and accessible, guaranteeing a shelter bed and emergency services for each homeless person every night. Boston has served as a national model of innovation. Yet, despite the best efforts of Boston's dedicated homeless advocates, service providers and a concerned City government, the incidence of homelessness is still rising. From 1989 to 1999, the number of homeless people counted in the City of Boston's annual Homeless Census rose from 3,830 to 5,820, a 52 percent increase.

There are a number of factors that have converged to create this critical situation. A booming economy has put high demands on an already tight housing market. Real wages for the least skilled sector of the population have not risen with the cost of living, sapping the resources of individuals and families struggling to get by. In addition, the impact of significant policy changes such as welfare reform and the statewide end of rent control has also brought pressure to bear on the housing market.



To make matters worse, the amount of federal housing funds targeted to homeless individuals and families channeled into Boston has decreased significantly in recent years. In 1995, the City of Boston received \$19.5 million in federal homeless McKinney funds.¹ By 1999, that amount had decreased by 37 percent. During this same period, the amount of state funding dedicated to supporting affordable housing has also decreased. These reductions do not correspond to a decreasing need for shelter and services among homeless individuals and families. In fact, the reduction in funding has forced the City to make difficult decisions about whether or not to continue funding existing homeless programs that provide needed services or to develop new and innovative ones to meet emerging needs.

In addition, existing State human services policies, especially those related to discharge planning for emergency medical services or long-term institutionalization, have resulted in Boston's shelter system becoming a "safety net" for various State agencies at a time when Boston's homeless services can ill afford an additional burden.

¹ McKinney homeless funds are administered by the US Department of Housing and Urban and Development to support housing and services for homeless individuals and families.

Consequently, there has been a growing recognition among homeless advocates, service providers and City of Boston officials that it would not be possible to adequately address the problem of homelessness with homeless-targeted resources alone. With this recognition it became clear that a more comprehensive community-wide planning process was needed. This process would have to look beyond McKinney funds to mainstream resources and other funding opportunities, as well as policy and programmatic changes, such as solutions to homelessness.

Recognizing that the crisis of affordable housing in Boston had an impact beyond the scope of the SHPG, Mayor Thomas M. Menino convened a Housing Advisory Panel of housing advocates, developers, academics and City officials to formulate a comprehensive housing strategy in the Spring of 2000. Their report, *Leading The Way: A Housing Strategy For Boston*, will serve as the functional blueprint for the City's housing efforts to increase production and preserve existing affordable housing over the next three years. In addition, *Leading The Way* calls on various City, State and Federal partners to increase their commitment to affordable housing production and preservation and to aid the City in creative problem-solving. The SHPG Report is an important part of the City's overall housing strategy, as it is a blueprint for directly addressing the needs of the population most vulnerable to the vicissitudes of the affordable housing crisis, homeless people. Many of the recommendations of the SHPG regarding permanent housing were incorporated into *Leading The Way: A Housing Strategy For Boston*.

From 1990 to 1997, the number of homeless families increased an estimated 100 percent and the number of homeless individuals increased by an estimated 70 percent.
– From *A Profile of Housing in Massachusetts*, UMASS

The six (6) major recommendations developed by the SHPG call for alterations in policy, reconfigurations of existing services, and creative public/private partnerships as part of a comprehensive effort to better meet the needs of Boston's homeless individuals and families. In summary, these recommendations are to:

- 1. Expand the supply of and access to permanent affordable housing**
- 2. Expand employment opportunities and economic services to assist homeless people in becoming self-sufficient;**
- 3. Prevent homelessness through improved discharge planning and on-going coordination among State and local criminal justice and social service agencies;**
- 4. Maintain and strengthen the existing infrastructure and current capacity of Boston's homeless system;**
- 5. Improve coordination and collaboration among homeless providers to meet the needs of under-served populations; and**
- 6. Advocate with Federal, State and local agencies to increase public awareness and access to mainstream resources**

The body of this report presents a plan designed to help Boston's homeless individuals and families negotiate their way through a system designed to move people to economic independence and self-sufficiency. It is the culmination of a sometimes difficult, but ultimately rewarding process in which diverse individuals and constituencies found common ground in pursuit of a common goal. The process of preparing this report has already yielded outcomes – including important changes in policies – that will have an impact on homeless individuals and families.

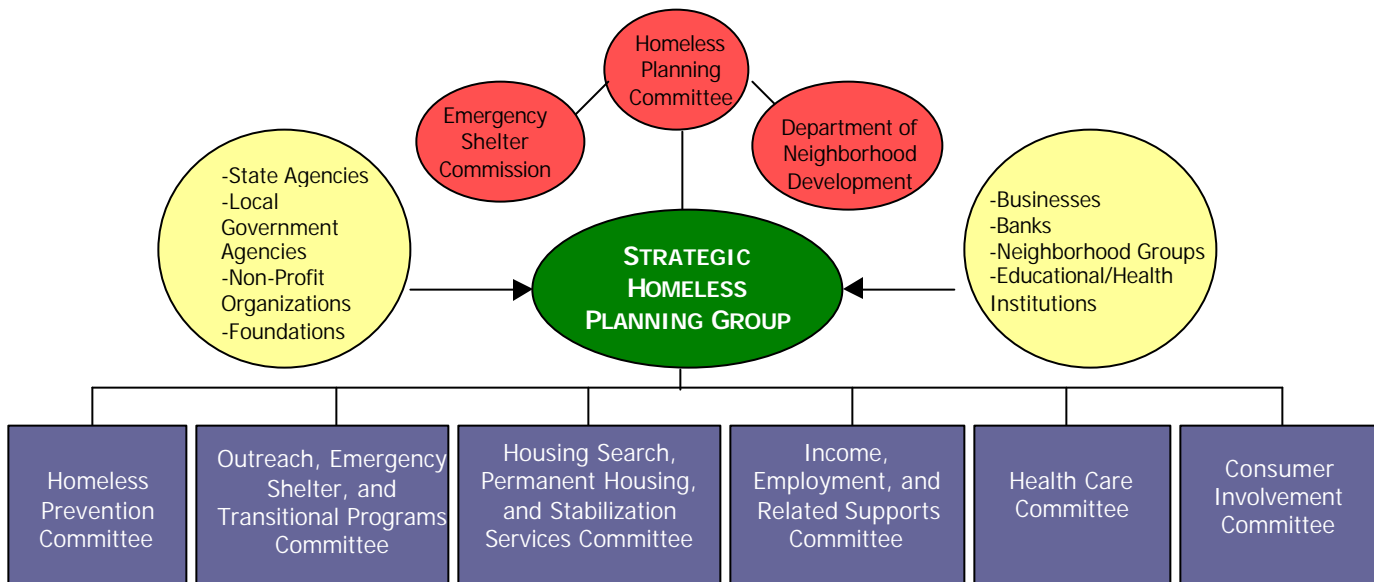
The SHPG recognizes that traditional sources of revenue and resources alone cannot solve the problem of rising homelessness. This report calls for an authentic public/private partnership to be established. This partnership must focus the skills and resources of the business community on behalf of Boston's homeless men, women, and children. While the SHPG Report also recognizes that success in combating homelessness will not come without the continued dedicated efforts of those people and organizations already working on behalf of Boston's homeless individuals and families, it calls upon those who have not participated previously to join this critical effort. Homelessness has not been vanquished in the City of Boston; the economic good times that have been beneficial to so many have not translated into personal financial success for the most vulnerable of the citizenry. The time to take action is now, while the resources of a burgeoning economy are available for new applications that will benefit the homeless and the under-served.

Strategic Homeless Planning Group

In 1998, representatives of City government, service providers, advocates, formerly homeless people, and other community stakeholders established the Strategic Homeless Planning Group (SHPG) to address growing concerns about rising homelessness in Boston. SHPG's mission has always been clear – to work collaboratively to move the city's planning efforts to the next level – one where larger issues of state and regional policy, as well as obstacles to the production and provision of housing and services for the homeless could more effectively be addressed.

The charge of the SHPG was to:

- ensure that Boston's overall homeless planning and policy decisions included meaningful input from a wide range of key entities; and
- identify innovative strategies, including the use of mainstream resources, to address homelessness in Boston.



The City's Emergency Shelter Commission, Homeless Planning Committee and staff of the Department of Neighborhood Development (DND) coordinated the SHPG planning efforts by facilitating buy-in and legitimacy for the recommendations from community leaders and City officials. Over the course of the planning process, they have been in touch with key City of Boston officials, such as Boston Mayor Thomas M. Menino and Charlotte Golar Richie, Chief of Housing and DND's Director. Throughout the planning process, this level of informed discourse with and access to senior City officials allowed for a constant system of "reality checking" and streamlined the approval of this report by the City of Boston.

SHPG Planning Process

The complexity of Boston's homeless service provider and advocacy system required that planning occur on many different organizational levels and within a variety of different structures. Given this level of complexity, the SHPG planning process relied heavily on committees² composed of key stakeholders in a particular field for the majority of the important analysis and review. These committee members met often in their efforts to develop the recommendations contained in this report.

The committees often consulted with key informants from the community with expertise in specific areas, such as workforce development. This approach maximized participation by a wider range of community players. In addition, it made the best use of each individual's talents, skills, and community standing – ensuring that the planning process was meaningful.

Guiding Principles of the SHPG Planning Process

- Expand permanent housing and service resources to prevent and end homelessness among adults and children.
- Expand access to mainstream housing, employment, and service resources wherever possible for people who become, or are at risk of becoming, homeless while recognizing the continued need for targeted resources for individuals and families who become homeless.
- Promote strategies for long-term and permanent solutions to prevent and end homelessness while maintaining a commitment to meet peoples' basic needs of shelter, food, and clothing.
- Promote coordination of state and local policies and resources to comprehensively support people who become, or are at risk of becoming, homeless.
- Prioritize strategies that prevent adults and children from becoming homeless.
- Prioritize strategies that assist adults and children who have become, or are at risk of becoming, homeless to access and maintain safe, decent, and affordable housing.
- Increase public awareness of the tragedy of homelessness and combat the stigma often associated with homelessness.
- Emphasize performance and outcomes and build upon what works.
- Involve people who have become homeless, or are at risk of becoming homeless, in the decisions necessary to regain housing stability and basic quality of life, in particular by building upon people's assets and encouraging personal responsibility.
- Include people who have become homeless in on-going planning, implementation, and monitoring activities to achieve the goal of preventing and ending homelessness.
- Employ strategies that embrace regional solutions to prevent and end homelessness

² The six committees focused on discrete components of Boston's homeless system including: homeless prevention; outreach, emergency shelter, and transitional programs; permanent housing (including search and stabilization services and permanent supportive housing); income, employment, and related supports; integrated health care; and consumer involvement.

Background and Findings

Boston's Homeless Individuals and Families

Every winter, the City of Boston tries to gather a complete picture of who is homeless in Boston to determine barriers they face to achieving and maintaining permanent housing. On December 13th, 1999, there were 3,665 individuals in the adult shelter system, and an additional 250 individuals not accessing shelters and living on the street. There were 1,905 men, women, and children in the family shelter system as well.

Each homeless person is different and has become homeless due to a unique set of circumstances. Many people become homeless due to lack of income. According to a recent University of Massachusetts statewide survey, over one third of those homeless individuals surveyed had no source of income. For homeless families, the situation was similar with almost one third of these families lacking income and over half receiving only public assistance.

Characteristics of Homeless Individuals and Families*

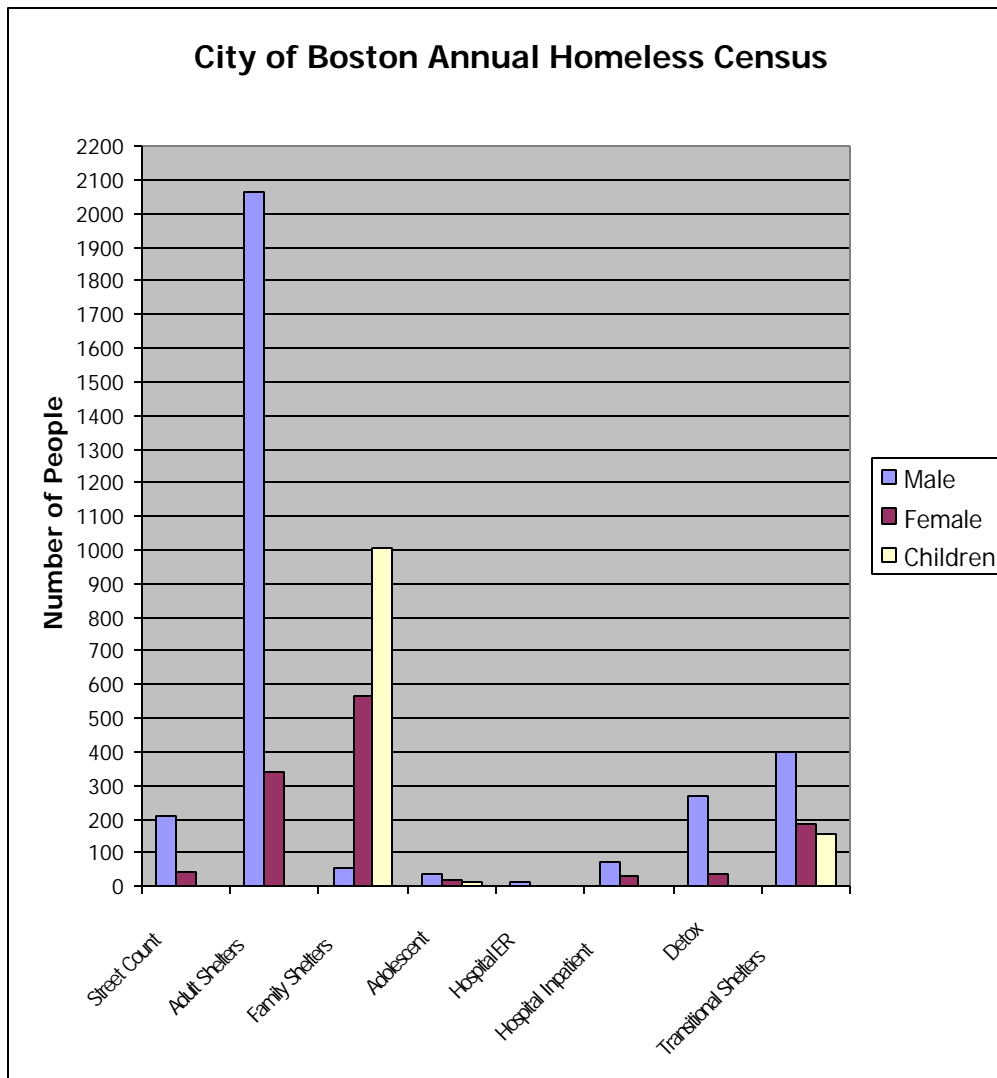
Homeless Individuals:

- The majority (78%) of homeless individuals are men;
- The average age of an individual shelter consumer is 39. 12% are ages 24 or under and 8 percent are over 55;
- More than one-quarter are employed, either exclusively or in conjunction with public assistance. Men are more likely than women to be employed; youth are more likely to be working than adults or elders;
- Over 50% have no high school diploma or GED;
- Over one-third (32%) have no source of income;
- An additional 41% receive public assistance including SSI/SSDI and food stamps.

Homeless Families:

- The average age of the head of household is 32;
- 69% of homeless families are single or have never been married;
- Almost 30% of homeless families report having no source of income and an additional 50% receive TAFDC. 15% of homeless families report income from employment;
- Over 60% of family heads have not completed high school or received a GED;
- Almost two thirds of homeless families consist of a parent and 1-2 children.

** According to a UMASS survey of 8,411 unduplicated individuals and 1,022 unduplicated families accessing over 140 homeless programs statewide.*



Current Homeless Services in Boston

For years, Boston has worked strategically to combat the problem of homelessness. Over the years, a broad network of shelter and service providers, housing organizations, state agencies, and advocacy and planning groups have worked in concert with city officials to develop a system of care that meets the varied and complex needs of homeless people.

As a result, Boston's existing homeless system incorporates the full range of housing and services designed to address the needs of homeless individuals and families. Combined these services provide Boston's homeless individuals and families with access to a "safety net" of services and supports that ensures a shelter bed each night, support services, and the increased availability of employment and permanent housing opportunities.

Boston's homeless services today include short-term emergency shelters, transitional housing (generally up to 24 month maximum length of stay), and permanent housing (including permanent supportive housing).

Boston has also developed an array of supportive services enabling homeless individuals and families to make the transition from the street and shelters to permanent housing and from dependence on supportive services to self-sufficiency. These supportive services are the critical link in moving homeless persons along the continuum of services at a pace and scale appropriate to their individualized needs and circumstances. Services are funded through a variety of different mechanisms, including City, State, and Federal resources as well as foundation grants and in-kind donations.

RESOURCE	HOMELESS POPULATION	BEDS/UNITS*
EMERGENCY SHELTER	General – individual	2,190
	General – families	1,516
	Victims of domestic violence	95
	Veterans	160
	Respite – critical medical needs	88
	Day programs	9 programs
TRANSITIONAL PROGRAMS	General – individual	1,412
	General – families	77
	Victims of domestic violence	85
	Substance abusers	1,005
	Mentally ill	317
	Veterans	160
	Dually diagnosed	165
	HIV/AIDS	136
	Youth	70
	Elders	80
	Pregnant and parenting teens	187
PERMANENT HOUSING	Shelter Plus Care/SHP Permanent	328
	HOPWA	80
	Section 8 and Public Housing**	800
	Other Section and Moderate Rehab	546

* Programs administered by the City of Boston.

** Section 8 vouchers are administered by both the Boston Housing Authority and the Department of Housing and Community Development (through the Metropolitan Boston Housing Partnership.)

Causes of Homelessness

Unfortunately, these services and efforts have not completely offset the effects of an extremely tight housing market and recent social changes. Implementation of welfare reform, the statewide abolition of rent control, and changes in federal housing policies have converged at a time when an economic boom had already begun to have an effect on Boston's housing prices. The resulting affordable housing crisis has been most keenly felt by those already homeless and those individuals and families who were just managing to get by. According to the most recent data, there are 5,820 homeless people and 26,300 individuals and families at risk of homelessness in Boston.

Housing Market

Over the past few years, Boston has seen unprecedented economic growth resulting in a significant decrease in the unemployment rate. This positive growth, however, has had a negative effect on the housing market. A recent report from the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) documented that the cost of new homes in Boston has increased 45 percent over the past five years – the highest increase in the country. The market is tight for renters as well. Currently, Boston has the nation's fourth highest market with a median rent of \$1,465.

Combined with the repeal of rent control, the booming market has led to intense competition for existing rental housing and a dramatic increase in the costs associated with buying a home. Recent data gathered by housing advocates documents that the vacancy rate is as low as 1 percent in some Boston neighborhoods. In the Fenway/Kenmore Square area, for example, the median rent for a one-bedroom apartment in 1999 was \$1,350. Making matters worse is the number of owners of affordable housing developments that have decided not to renew contracts with HUD, thus allowing these owners to increase rents dramatically.

As mentioned earlier, the reduction of federal funding directed to the city is another major barrier to maintaining affordable housing options. Between 1994 and 1997, federal funding for housing in Massachusetts was cut by 12 percent, or \$28 million. The city has spent a considerable amount of resources dealing with the effects of these changes. For example, this past year the city committed over \$2.5 million to preserve over 400 units of affordable housing.

Even when housing is available and a household can afford the rent payment, there are barriers that make it difficult to obtain and maintain the housing. The move-in costs of first and last month's rent plus a security deposit are a formidable barrier to poor individuals and families that have difficulty making ends meet each month. Once in housing, any crisis, such as job loss, health emergency, or alcohol or drug relapse, can cause the household to begin the spiral back into homelessness.

"Since 1991, the median advertised rent for a two-bedroom Boston apartment has exploded by 77 percent..."

-From *The Boston Globe*,
September 17, 2000.

The average worker in Boston needs to work 135 hours each week to be able to afford a modest two-bedroom apartment priced at HUD's Fair Market Rent.

- From *National Low Income Housing Coalition*

Policy Changes

A person with a disability receiving Supplemental Security Income (SSI) has to spend over 146 percent of their monthly income to be able to afford a modest one-bedroom apartment in Boston.

– From *Priced Out in 1998*,
Technical Assistance
Collaborative.

Another issue contributing to the problem is welfare reform, which was implemented in December of 1998 and has led to housing affordability problems for many of Boston's low-income families. The most recent UMASS study⁴ documents that 29 percent of homeless families have no income source. This is a dramatic increase from the past year's figure of 11 percent. National studies have also shown that a substantial number of these families are either at risk of, or living in poverty, and are facing hardships such as having trouble paying for food, utility bills, and rent. In addition, strict income limits at state-funded family shelters make it difficult for working homeless families to access shelter. Although these income limits were recently increased, many families are still in a "no win" situation, since they do not earn enough to pay rent, yet earn too much to be able to enter shelters.

Finally, recent years have seen a dramatic increase in the number of individuals entering the shelter system from correctional facilities, hospitals, and mental health institutions. A 1997 survey documented that approximately 19 percent of emergency shelter residents had been incarcerated within the past 12 months,⁵ and homeless providers report that this percentage has increased significantly over the past few years. Much of this increase is due to inappropriate and inadequate discharge planning from state facilities.

In sum, despite the efforts of dedicated service providers and the existence of many effective programs, Boston's homeless system is still not meeting the needs of all homeless individuals and families nor is it adequately funded. Within this climate, McKinney resources can no longer be expected to be the sole funding to support the homeless system. Instead, it is only through the coordination of all resources targeted toward homeless families and individuals with the addition of new mainstream resources that Boston can truly be effective in addressing this crisis with an eye toward moving people into stable housing.

Boston's Recent Efforts to Address the Affordable Housing Crisis

As mentioned earlier, the City recently released *Leading the Way* outlining Boston's housing strategy for the next three years. Under Mayor Menino's leadership, this three-year campaign will unify and focus all of the city's housing agencies around a comprehensive strategy to advance key objectives: produce new housing at all income levels and preserve as much of the city's affordable housing as possible. The key objectives included in *Leading the Way* strengthen and enhance those recommendations and action steps outlined by the SHPG.

⁴ Meschede, et al, *A Comparative Portrait of Individuals and Families Utilizing Massachusetts Emergency Shelter Programs, 1999*. McCormack Institute of Public Affairs at University at Massachusetts, Boston, MA.

⁵ Friedman, et al, *A Snapshot of Individuals and Families Accessing Boston's Emergency Homeless Shelters, 1997*. McCormack Institute of Public Affairs at University at Massachusetts, Boston, MA.

Leading the Way and the work of the SHPG are just a few of the City of Boston's proactive efforts to address the growing number of homeless citizens. In 1999, Mayor Menino designated the newly appointed Director of the Department of Neighborhood Development to serve at the cabinet level as Chief of Housing. He had filled this position with Charlotte Golar Richie, a State Representative who had served as the Chair of the Joint Committee on Housing and Urban Development. In addition, he established a weekly forum for communication between key City agencies to discuss housing production, preservation and key development issues, including permitting. The Mayor also appointed a new Housing Advisory Committee made up of businesses, foundations, homeless providers, banks, realtors, and housing developers. Their recommendations became the basis of the strategy to increase permanent affordable housing options in Boston. Lastly, the Mayor has utilized innovative strategies to supplement the dwindling pipeline of State and Federal dollars. Not only has he proposed to raise the linkage fee, but he has also pledged to use the funds raised from the proceeds of the sale of the former police headquarters on Berkeley St. to create affordable housing.

Boston's innovations in dealing with and focus on creating solutions for the housing crisis has not gone unnoted. The City has been recognized by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) for many of its achievements in addressing the needs of homeless people. Some of these achievements include:

- [Boston Rental Assistance Fund](#): a flexible fund used to address a variety of the barriers that prevent homeless people from getting into permanent housing - such as first and last month's rent, security deposit, moving expenses, broker's fees, - as well as providing up to one year of limited rental assistance;
- [Homeless Set-Aside Clearinghouse](#): a formal referral system that links homeless people to housing units that have been set aside specifically for this use;
- [Connection, Service, and Partnership through Technology \(CSP Tech\)](#): a management information system that tracks the homeless population in order to provide information to planners who are allocating programs and services to homeless households; and
- [Emergency Shelter Security Deposit Funds](#): funds administered jointly by the Boston Housing Authority and the Emergency Shelter Commission to pay security deposits directly to landlords on behalf of homeless families.

Advocacy groups, such as the Massachusetts Housing and Shelter Alliance, the Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless, and Homes for Families have also been key players in the fight to preserve and expand housing opportunities. They have been successful in advocating for changes at the state and federal level to address many of the causes of homelessness, such as inappropriate and inadequate discharge planning.

These efforts by advocacy groups and City officials are important and their impact on the availability of housing for homeless people is significant. However, more work needs to be done to address all the factors that affect homeless individuals and families – not just the supply of affordable housing – and the City of Boston can't do it alone. The recommendations included in this report provide an action plan for City and State officials, advocates, and non-profit housing and service providers to work collaboratively to end homelessness

Recommendations

People who are poor and homeless face many obstacles that perpetuate their poverty and prevent them from achieving self-sufficiency. Limited access to affordable housing, employment opportunities, and health care – including substance abuse treatment, HIV/AIDS education, and mental health counseling – keep thousands of individuals and families dependent on shelters and supportive services.

As part of their efforts, the SHPG developed a vision for Boston's ideal homeless system. The vision stated:

The City of Boston is committed to assisting every adult and child who becomes homeless or is at risk of becoming homeless to regain housing stability and quality of life. Toward this end, Boston will continue to implement and expand a comprehensive homeless system to prevent and end the tragedy of homelessness among all individuals and families.

This vision guided the development of the six major long-range recommendations presented in this report including:

- 1. Expand the supply of and access to permanent affordable housing***
- 2. Expand employment opportunities and economic services to assist homeless people in becoming self-sufficient;***
- 3. Prevent homelessness through improved discharge planning and on-going coordination among State and local criminal justice and social service agencies;***
- 4. Maintain and strengthen the existing infrastructure and current capacity of Boston's homeless system;***
- 5. Improve coordination and collaboration among homeless providers to meet the needs of under-served populations; and***
- 6. Work with Federal, State, and local agencies to increase public awareness and access to mainstream resources***



Expand Supply of and Access to Permanent Affordable Housing

The availability of permanent affordable housing is one of the most critical gaps in the homeless system. Without an adequate supply of affordable housing, and the ability to access this housing, movement through the homeless shelter system is hindered.

Low-income housing is in short supply throughout the city. As mentioned earlier, the amount of federal and state funding for affordable housing has decreased significantly in recent years. Making the situation even worse, Boston's recent economic boom has had a negative impact on the housing market by leading to intense competition for existing rental housing. Within this high cost housing market it is imperative that efforts are made to both preserve existing affordable housing – such as SROs targeted to low-income individuals – as well as to develop new affordable housing and expand the availability of rental assistance programs.

The development of low-income housing is a long-term process and fraught with difficulty on a number of levels. Aside from the difficulty of finding suitable and available land, and overcoming neighborhood barriers that often arise in the siting of these developments, a major obstacle has been the lack of commitment among experienced developers to create projects that serve very low and extremely low-income households. Without incentives – such as project based rental subsidies from funders (including the City, State, and private lenders) – these developers have little interest in developing affordable housing for homeless individuals and families.

There is interest among non-profit homeless provider organizations in creating this type of affordable housing, but although they have passion and dedication, these organizations often lack the experience and skills necessary to develop housing for homeless individuals and families. Strengthening and building the capacity of non-profit organizations is critical to the success of future funding initiatives leading to the development of more permanent low-income housing. It has long been recognized that non-profit organizations build some of the best low-income housing in Boston, but this is not an easy task since it requires highly skilled and dedicated people to achieve this goal. Building capacity means providing training in matters related to housing finance, land use law, architecture, construction, and public policy. It means developing the skills to work with individuals, neighborhood groups, and institutions that will be affected by future development. It also means securing the funding necessary to develop decent wage and benefit packages, and to access technical assistance and the support necessary to maximize efficiency and streamline the development process.

Specific Action Steps

1. **Produce New Rental/Low-Income Housing** After analyzing data on the utilization of existing programs, and reviewing the demand for permanent affordable housing, the SHPG recommends a production goal of **300 units of housing in the next year**, and a total of **1,500 over the next five years**. These units can be produced via these action steps:

- **Require the City to provide an annual commitment** (dependent upon interest and capacity of developers) towards the production of permanent housing for homeless people and prioritize housing development projects that include housing for homeless people. Additional City resources set-aside for housing production should include funds earmarked for the development of homeless housing.

Responsible Parties: Department of Neighborhood Development and Boston Housing Authority.

- **Require the Boston Housing Authority (BHA) to continue to set-aside** annually 100 Section 8 project based subsidies and to implement a policy that designates homelessness as a Priority 1 category for the Section 8 tenant-based program.

Responsible Party: Boston Housing Authority.

2. **Build successful working partnerships with the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.** The permanent housing crisis extends throughout the Greater Boston region and beyond. The burden and the responsibility to address its causes and find solutions lies within all area governments. While the City of Boston and other local governments often jointly fund permanent housing development projects with the state Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD), this is usually on a “hit or miss” basis with little coordination. Given the magnitude of Boston’s current affordable housing crisis, a more thoughtful, proactive, and coordinated effort is required to develop permanent housing specifically targeted to homeless individuals and families. This joint effort should include the development of a clear structural linkage between the city and DHCD with collaboration around funding strategies, funding set-asides, resources, and other pro-active attempts to increase the supply of permanent housing for homeless individuals and families. Efforts must be made to establish close working partnerships with DHCD to gain its active participation in the development of housing for homeless individuals and families. Specifically, the SHPG recommends:

- **Replicate successful City programs at the State level** by: requiring DHCD to establish a 10 percent set-aside for homeless people in all DHCD-funded housing development projects; amend its Low Income Housing Tax Credit allocation plan to prioritize projects that serve homeless people; and allocate Section 8 project based subsidies targeted to homeless people.

Responsible Parties: Massachusetts Housing and Shelter Alliance, Homes for Families, Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless, Citizens Housing and Planning Association, AIDS Housing Corporation, with Department of Neighborhood Development.

3. **Encourage Community Development Corporations (CDCs), non-profit organizations, and for-profit developers to develop housing for homeless people** The development of permanent housing for homeless individuals and families cannot be achieved without the active participation of the city's experienced Community Development Corporations and other non- and for-profit developers. Unfortunately, these key players have not been active in the development of housing for this population. The City of Boston must create incentives to encourage these agencies to actively pursue the development of permanent housing for homeless individuals and families. To this end, the City of Boston should engage the CDCs, non-profit organizations, and for-profit developers in a dialogue to create partnerships, address barriers to development, create appropriate incentives, and brainstorm around creative development strategies.

Responsible Party: Department of Neighborhood Development.

4. **Increase access to vacant units by homeless individuals and families.** Even when a homeless person receives a Section 8 voucher or other form of rental assistance, the current housing market has made it virtually impossible to locate a vacant unit in which that voucher can be used. To address this dilemma, the SHPG recommends:

- Develop a flexible security deposit and shallow rental subsidy program.

Responsible Parties: Massachusetts Housing and Shelter Alliance, Massachusetts Non-Profit Housing Association, Department of Housing and Community Development, Metropolitan Boston Housing Partnership, and Boston Housing Authority.

- **Provide outreach and education to owners of rental property and realtors** regarding the benefits and misconceptions of the Section 8 program. Target those owners that have accessed home repair funds in an effort to expand the number of safe and decent units eligible for Section 8 tenant based subsidies.

Responsible Parties: Metropolitan Boston Housing Partnership, Boston Housing Authority, Boston Rental Housing Resource Center, and Boston Office of Civil Rights.

5. **Build successful working partnerships with the private sector.**

City and other public resources cannot alone meet the permanent housing need of Boston's residents. This can only be accomplished through an improved and expanded partnership with the private sector agencies and resources. Innovative partnerships need to be formed in order to increase the development of housing for homeless individuals and families either directly through the private sector or indirectly through resources raised by the private sector. Specifically, the SHPG recommends:

- Create a pool of money to provide below-market loans and grants to allow the City to produce additional affordable housing by increasing the private contribution to affordable housing developments. Some of these units will be available and accessible to homeless individuals and families.

Responsible Party: Private lenders and area institutions.

6. **Create a siting policy committee composed of homeless advocates, non-profit housing developers, CDCs, City staff, and other appropriate persons in order to develop clear and concise siting policies for City-funded developments.**

Communities are often reluctant to accept the development of new permanent housing in their neighborhoods, especially housing for homeless or special needs populations. This reluctance is often the result of ignorance regarding a particular population or housing development; fear of declining property values; or overall discrimination. However, a recent HUD report found that supportive housing projects actually had a *positive* impact on the property values in the surrounding neighborhood. Leadership is needed to disseminate this type of information, educate citizens about the positive impact of high quality supportive housing, and to facilitate the creation of new housing by assisting developers with understanding the steps involved in siting a housing development. Leadership efforts would include education regarding various populations and information regarding the actual impact of these developments on property values. Fair Housing laws should be incorporated into the siting policy to guard against discrimination.

Responsible Party: Department of Neighborhood Development.

Expand Employment Opportunities and Economic Services to Assist Homeless People to Become Self-Sufficient

Incomes for most homeless people, and those at risk of homelessness, are usually woefully inadequate for meeting their basic needs, especially housing. Whether from work or public benefits, the income of poor people has not kept pace with the cost of living for the past two decades. As a result, the ability to remain housed for poor households has been significantly undermined.

Ultimately, the major obstacle to decent, affordable housing is the reality that the majority of jobs in Boston accessible to homeless people do not pay a wage that enables them to afford housing. Reducing homelessness necessitates assisting those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness to gain access to jobs with wages that pay enough to cover real living costs. In order to compete in today's evolving job market, many homeless people need job training or re-training, followed by aggressive placement into "living wage" jobs. Moreover, due to their unique circumstances, training and placement for homeless people must also be matched by basic services such as appropriate clothing, literacy training, as well as more intensive services such as child care, ongoing job mentoring, counseling, and substance abuse treatment.

Under the federal Workforce Investment Act (WIA), the climate is changing and workforce development policies are in transition. The decisions that are made under the WIA will have an enduring impact on the accessibility of "living wage" jobs for homeless people. Thus it is critical that the employment needs of the homeless population are represented when setting the policies and implementation strategies under the WIA.

Specific Action Steps

The following action steps are designed to reduce barriers for homeless individuals and families in their effort to find and keep employment and housing.

1. **Create a comprehensive assessment tool and process for homeless individuals and families seeking employment.** Many people have multiple barriers to employment including: child care issues, physical limitations, mental health, domestic violence or substance abuse issues, developmental delays, or travel restrictions. In an effort to maximize a person's employment potential these issues should be uncovered and triaged to the appropriate sources as quickly as possible.

Responsible Party: SHPG Income and Employment Committee.

2. **Appoint representation to the City of Boston Workforce Investment Act Steering Committee** who will advocate for the specific and unique needs of homeless people and increase access to mainstream employment resources. The Workforce Investment Act restructures the Job Training Partnership Act to incorporate a regional approach to workforce development. Soon after President Clinton signed the WIA into law, the Department of Labor and Workforce Development was designated as the lead agency responsible for the WIA implementation in MA. The City of Boston has been designated a “workforce investment area” and as such, has convened a City of Boston Workforce Investment Board under the WIA. Mayor Menino should appoint this representative.

Responsible Party: Mayor Thomas Menino.

3. **Engage the corporate world as partners in employment.** Currently, the corporate world is not “hire-ready” for low skill population and they are facing a lack of labor because of this skill shortage. To engage them as partners in the employment of homeless individuals the issues must be redefined as labor shortage, labor recruitment, and retention. There are many ways to establish new partnerships with the corporate world including:

- **Provide technical assistance to employers interested in hiring low-income people** including advising businesses about the characteristics and needs of homeless people; strategizing about outreach to other businesses; and inviting employers to participate on advisory panels and boards of local job readiness programs.

Responsible Parties: Private Industry Council, Jobs and Community Services, and homeless economic providers.

- **Link the WIA Steering Committee and the City’s Homeless Planning Committee by conducting cross training** and fostering joint strategic planning to ensure that homeless people have access to new restructured workforce development resources.

Responsible Parties: Workforce Investment Act Steering Committee, Emergency Shelter Commission, and Homeless Planning Committee.

- **Raise visibility through an advertising campaign** that highlights the long-term advantages of investment in the low-skill population. Encourage corporate participation through the establishment of a Mayoral Award for businesses that have demonstrated a commitment to employing homeless people.

Responsible Parties: Jobs and Community Services; Mayor Menino.

- **Create a handbook of helpful tips** for interested employers on how to build a supportive workplace environment and infrastructure.

Responsible Parties: Non-profit economic development providers.

3. **Promote brokering services to ensure effective coordination.**

Employment services for homeless individuals are fragmented and often ineffective.

- **Advocate for the continued funding of collaborative support models** – like PATH in New York City – and assess whether such model could work and be funded in Boston.

Responsible Parties: Project Hope and Impact Employment Services.

- **Pressure state agencies to forge collaborations on behalf of homeless people.** Employment services for homeless people are often fragmented underlining the need for holistic and integrated planning at the State level.

Responsible Party: Massachusetts Housing and Shelter Alliance.



For some of Boston's low-income individuals and families, the line between being housed and homeless is very thin. Without strong, prevention programs, Boston's homeless population would increase exponentially. Prevention is the most cost-effective and successful mechanism for ensuring that individuals and families never need access to the "safety net" of services comprising Boston's homeless system.

Boston has developed numerous prevention programs ranging from rental arrearages and utility assistance to food banks. In aggregate, these programs work to address the many causes of homelessness in order to help individuals and families maintain their housing. However, as mentioned earlier, there are an estimated 26,300 people currently at-risk of becoming homeless. Combined with the recent social policy changes mentioned earlier, welfare reform and owners "opting out" of existing HUD contracts, there has been an increased demand for prevention services over the past few years. In addition, for some sub-populations, such as people with mental illness and youth, homelessness becomes a reality due to inappropriate and inadequate discharge planning on behalf of facilities managed by the state human services agencies (including substance abuse facilities, inpatient mental health institutions, correctional facilities, hospitals, and youth services).

Specific Action Steps

1. **Develop discharge policies and procedures –including the development of step-down resources – for each state and local human service agency to ensure that people leaving their facilities receive appropriate and adequate discharge planning and placement in stable housing.** Adequate and appropriate discharge planning from institutional settings (such as mental health facilities, hospitals, jails and other correctional facilities) is a vital part of any successful homeless prevention strategy. Agencies that should be targeted in this effort include: Department of Mental Health, Department of Public Health, Division of Medical Assistance, Massachusetts Behavioral Health Partnership, Department of Corrections, Department of Social Services, Department of Youth Services and the County Sheriffs Departments.

Responsible Parties: Executive Office of Administration and Finance, Executive Office of Health and Human Services, and State Homeless Task Force.

2. **Gather data to track discharge outcomes** through Boston's annual homeless census and point-in-time needs survey, as well as the Massachusetts Housing and Shelter Alliance's annual research and emerging sub-populations survey of area shelters. Use this data to hold the state human services agencies accountable for those people leaving their facilities.

Responsible Parties: Massachusetts Housing and Shelter Alliance, UMASS McCormack Institute, and Emergency Shelter Commission.

3. **Advocate for the development of a Family Support Grant to provide flexible assistance to families at risk of homelessness.** Because family needs are varied and not limited to conventional homeless prevention solutions (e.g., rental assistance), flexible grants and intensive case management would help these families avoid shelter and remain in their communities. This grant would support the emergency needs of families with direct financial assistance to be used for: rental assistance, food, medicine, transportation, child care and other needs as determined by the family in concert with a community service provider.

Responsible Parties: Homes for Families, Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless, and Massachusetts Non-Profit Housing Association.

Maintain and Strengthen the Existing Infrastructure and Current Capacity of Boston's Homeless System

As a result of an increasing number of people losing access to affordable housing each year and/or being discharged from other social service systems to the street, more individuals are forced to turn to the city's emergency shelters. This crisis should not be resolved solely through an expansion of the homeless system, but also through the preservation of existing effective infrastructure and maximization of homeless resources. This means that the current number of shelter beds, permanent housing units, residential treatment beds, and multi-service centers must be maintained. Creating new capacity will not result in a net increase if at the same time we are losing capacity elsewhere.

This does not necessarily mean supporting all of the same providers to provide the exact same services in their current locations. Services that cannot meet minimum standards of care, should be replaced. Services may be able to be delivered in a more cost-effective, yet still effective, manner or may be better suited to a different location. What this recommendation does mean, however, is that as grant terms expire, funding is lost, or as other challenges arise, there is a commitment to preserving the ability of the city's homeless providers to respond to emerging and emergent needs.

Specific Action Steps

1. **Advocate with federal, state, and local officials to preserve the existing supply of affordable housing units** by proactively and aggressively engaging owners in negotiations regarding issues of expiring use, condominium or rooming house conversions, etc.

Responsible Parties: Mayor Menino, Massachusetts Housing and Shelter Alliance, Citizens Housing and Planning Association, Department of Neighborhood Development, and homeless provider and advocacy organizations.

2. **Continuously monitor and evaluate existing homeless programs to determine if they are effective in assisting homeless individuals and families.** By evaluating these existing programs, the homeless community can identify any weak links among components of care and strengthen existing bonds. Methods should be developed to test links throughout the homeless system, determine where gaps exist, and encourage dialogue on difficult issues that create tension within the system, such as competition between providers for funding sources.

Responsible Parties: Department of Neighborhood Development, Emergency Shelter Commission, Homeless Planning Committee, Department of Housing and Community Development, and Executive Office of Health and Human Services.

3. **Improve the level of consumer involvement in homeless programs.** Providing mechanisms for incorporating the voices of those directly affected by policies is imperative to the successful delivery of homeless services. Experiences of persons who have been or are homeless are necessary to learn what works, what does not work, and what is missing in the homeless service system. Consumer involvement in homeless programs should be strengthened by:

- providing training and technical assistance for providers and city staff around various models of consumer involvement;
- identifying financial resources to pay consumers to participate in planning activities;
- evaluating the quality of consumer involvement in homeless programs during site visits by City and State staff; and
- developing a Consumer Involvement Manual that identifies models for involving consumers in homeless programs.

Responsible Parties: Emergency Shelter Commission, Department of Neighborhood Development, and SHPG Consumer Involvement Committee.

4. **Research and identify new and alternative funding resources to support existing homeless services and housing** Explore the effectiveness and availability of mainstream resources – including Community Development Block Grant, HOME, Housing Opportunities for People with AIDS, Department of Labor resources, Veterans Affairs resources – to fund existing programs. By diversifying funding resources, the homeless system will be able to maintain and strengthen the existing level of services while more effectively targeting limited McKinney funds.

Responsible Parties: Homeless Planning Committee, Emergency Shelter Commission, and Department of Neighborhood Development.

Improve Coordination and Collaboration Among Homeless Providers to Meet the Needs of Under-served Populations

For the past few years, Boston's shelter system has struggled to meet the growing need for emergency services while attempting to address the unique needs of emerging subpopulations, such as homeless elders or youths. In general, the existing shelter system, including both City- and State-funded programs, has been inadequate in meeting the complex needs of the various homeless populations. This inadequacy is due in a large part to the lack of a systematic intergovernmental approach which links both City and State resources to meet the emergency needs of homeless individuals and families. While providers have created a diverse network of 24-hour residential programs and transitional services, there is still a need for a more coordinated strategy between existing City, State, and non-profit providers.

In particular, homeless people with disabilities – such as those who suffer from physical health, mental health, or alcohol and drug issues – face great obstacles to meeting their housing and service needs. According to a recent UMASS study, 66 percent of homeless individuals surveyed reported having a primary disability of substance use, mental illness, physical disabilities, etc. Furthermore, many homeless people are dually or triply diagnosed.⁶ These problems should be recognized and treated holistically, but often are not because the systems that provide needed services operate autonomously. Obtaining all of these services from multiple, uncoordinated service systems is extremely difficult.

As a result, homeless people typically access supportive services only when their needs become acute, requiring the most expensive intervention. In fact, in one study researchers found that homeless people cost an average of \$2,414 more per hospital admission than other low-income patients.⁷ Improving the methods of delivery of supportive services to homeless people will both reduce the numbers of people who continue to cycle through periods of homelessness and reduce the high cost of acute medical, in-patient substance abuse, and psychiatric treatment.

Specific Action Steps

1. **Designate beds within emergency shelters and transitional programs for specific subpopulations matched with appropriate specialized services.** These services should be integrated into the shelter system through the training of existing shelter staff and the creation of specialized support service staff to assist throughout the shelter network where necessary.

Responsible Parties: Boston shelter providers.

2. **Create a family respite facility for homeless families with extensive health problems** similar to those that exist for homeless individuals. A large percentage of homeless families have their situations complicated by one or more family members suffering from a major medical condition. Current shelter services are not equipped to provide the level of health services that many families need.

Responsible Parties: Homes for Families and Health Care for the Homeless.

⁶ 1999 Report on Homelessness. University of Massachusetts, Boston, MA. 1999

⁷ Homeless Patients are Found to Place Disproportionate Weight on Hospitals. The Wall Street Journal, Thursday, June 11, 1998 – Health.

3. **Provide more alternative emergency shelter for families who have been denied access to state-funded shelters.**

Responsible Parties: Emergency Shelter Commission, Homes For Families, and Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless

4. **Ensure transportation for families to their primary care provider during the families' placement in an emergency or transitional shelter** by conducting a thorough investigation of the existing transportation options. Meeting with key stakeholders (such as the Department of Transitional Assistance and the Metropolitan Boston Transit Authority) to explore the possibility of having homeless families with complex health concerns remain in shelters close to their primary care provider.

Responsible Party: Health Care for the Homeless and Travelers Aid.

5. **Provide cross training for staff of housing and service programs on the unique needs of special subpopulations** particularly elderly, youth, gay/lesbian/bi-sexual/transgender individuals, people with HIV/AIDS, and victims of domestic violence.

Responsible Parties: Department of Public Health, Emergency Shelter Commission, AIDS Housing Corporation, and homeless advocacy organizations.

6. **Analyze model programs being used throughout the city, state, and across the nation to identify best practices and explore potential for replication in Boston.** Present these programs at a Best Practices Conference.

Responsible Party: Massachusetts Housing and Shelter Alliance.

7. **Develop a centralized care coordination system available 24-hours per day and staffed by nursing care coordinators.** Despite a rich framework of health care providers and programs, many homeless individuals and families continue to fall through the cracks in the system due to a lack of coordinated services. The purpose of this system would be to act as a resource to individuals, families, hospitals, emergency departments, and others to assist with discharge planning/placement and to facilitate the development of discharge criteria for hospitals to utilize while caring for homeless persons. The system would also alert caregivers or provide direct intervention when an individual appears to be at risk.

Responsible Party: Health Care for the Homeless.

Advocate with Federal, State, and Local Agencies to Increase Public Awareness and Access to Mainstream Resources

Advocacy is a critical component of Boston's overall plan to combat homelessness. While this advocacy can take many forms, ranging from advocacy for new funding opportunities and policy changes to advocacy for increasing community understanding of homelessness and support of programs to assist homeless people. This work must be on-going and continue with vigor until Boston has achieved its vision of preventing and ending the tragedy of homelessness among all individuals and families.

Specific Action Steps

1. **Continue to advocate with the State Legislature** to ensure that the supply of state-funded affordable housing (including public housing and rental assistance) and shelter beds are preserved and continue to be accessible to homeless individuals and families.

Responsible Parties: Massachusetts Housing and Shelter Alliance, Homes for Families, Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless, and the Citizens Housing and Planning Association.

2. **Continue to meet with Federal elected officials** to ensure that valuable Federal homeless targeted resources (such as McKinney funding) are maintained and that all Federal resources are available and accessible to homeless people.

Responsible Parties: Emergency Shelter Commission, Massachusetts Housing and Shelter Alliance, and Department of Neighborhood Development.

3. **Support advocacy organizations** in securing local, State, and Federal funding to assist homeless individuals and families.

Responsible Party: SHPG and Homeless Planning Committee.

Next Steps

The recommendations and action steps presented in this report provide feasible steps to address a complex problem, but they are just the beginning. On-going discussions and collaborations must occur in order to continue to address the changing needs of homeless individuals and families in the face of new social reforms and changes in leadership. Without structures in place and people to carry out the work, these recommendations cannot be implemented. With this in mind, the SHPG will continue to meet quarterly to monitor the progress toward completing recommendations and to address any barriers or impediments that may arise. At the macro level, the City and community as a whole, need to commit to support these recommendations; to work together to coordinate and carry out the specific action steps; and to ensure that needs of homeless individuals and families are truly addressed.

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